

School Social Work Roles

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*For more information from the School
Social Work Practice Guide visit:
http://sspw.dpi.wi.gov/sspw_sswguide*

School social workers use a wide range of evidence-based strategies to ensure that students are in the classroom physically and mentally ready to learn. They utilize a strength-based approach that views students and organizations as parts of systems. The functioning of and relationships within and between systems are enhanced to improve student learning.

School social workers understand how to go out into the greater community to engage families and community organizations to create better outcomes for students (e.g., increased academic achievement, safety, attendance, and social-emotional-behavioral functioning). School districts usually focus their school social work services on students who are struggling in school due to barriers to learning that may exist within the students or their environments.

Information gathered through the Wisconsin School Social Worker Survey indicates the top ten professional strategies and programs used by Wisconsin school social workers include:

1. Advocacy for students and families,
2. Individual student counseling,
3. Consultation to teachers, administrators, and other school staff,
4. Referral and information,
5. Casework and management,
6. Facilitating and serving on pupil services and building consultation teams,
7. Crisis intervention and coordination,
8. Assessment of students,
9. School-home-community liaison, and
10. Group work, counseling, and student assistance programs.

The same survey results indicate that the top ten issues and areas of responsibility that school social workers are addressing are:

1. Students who are high risk for not graduating from high school,
2. Behavior management,
3. Mental health and illness,
4. Attendance, truancy, and dropouts,
5. Parent-child relationships,
6. Basic human needs (i.e., food, shelter, clothing, health care),
7. Special education,

8. Crisis,
9. Family trauma and change, and
10. Conflict resolution and anger management.

The school social work roles listed below are best provided within the context of an organized, comprehensive pupil services model. This list is not exhaustive but represents a range of services that may be provided by school social workers.

Assessment, Screening, and Evaluation

- IEP and 504 evaluation teams
- Social-developmental histories
- Building consultation teams
- Kindergarten screening
- Depression/suicide screening
- Abuse and neglect screening
- Alcohol and other drug (AOD) screening
- Response to Intervention (RtI)
- Functional behavioral assessments

Individual and Small Group Student Services

- Educational support groups (AOD, anger management, social skills, divorce, etc.)
- Individual counseling and problem-solving
- Services to pregnant and parenting teens
- Advocacy for student access to school- and community-based services and instruction
- Behavioral intervention plans
- Crisis Intervention
 - Traumatic events
 - Family crisis
 - Safety
 - Suicidal ideation
 - Mandated reports of suspected child abuse or neglect

Home-School Collaboration

- Home visits and telephone contacts
- Parent education and support
- Family assistance in finding and utilizing community resources

Collaboration and Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations

- Coordination of student transition to/from foster care, corrections, detention, residential treatment, and Birth to 3 programs
- Educational resource to community groups

- Coordination of community resources with school services
- Development and management of collaborative relationships with community agencies
- Referrals to community resources
- Advocacy for school and district roles with the greater community

Classroom Instruction

- Protective behaviors, AOD, suicide prevention, mental health, dating violence, bullying and other areas dealing with safety, prevention, health promotion, and asset-building

Services for School Staff

- Consultation and problem-solving
- Employee assistance and wellness
- Staff development
- Team facilitation

Program, Resource, and Policy Development

- Curriculum
- Attendance and truancy
- Building and district crisis response
- Programs and services to meet the needs of specific populations: homeless/mobile students, school age parents, English as a Second Language (ESL) students and families, students of color and their families, gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender-questioning (GLBTQ) students, etc.
- School climate and environment
- Harassment, bullying, and nondiscrimination
- Discipline, suspension, and expulsion
- Grant writing and management
- Confidentiality and release of student records

Systems Change to Improve Learning and Support Services

- Within the school (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports)
- Between the schools and the greater community